

HOUSE BILL 2908
By Callicott

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, to enact the Right to Read Act of 1996.

WHEREAS, English is the official language of the United States of America; and

WHEREAS, it is a fundamental fact that written English (English Language) is based on the alphabetic principle and is a phonetic language; and

WHEREAS, the philosophy that learning to read is just like learning to speak is accepted by no responsible linguist, reading psychologist, or cognitive scientist in the research community; and

WHEREAS, educational research clearly supports systematic phonics instruction as the most effective and efficient way to teach an individual to read; and

WHEREAS, recent surveys conducted by the United States Department of Education continue to show a serious decline in the ability of elementary and secondary students to read in the United States in general and in Tennessee in particular; and

WHEREAS, almost all teacher colleges, universities, and public schools teach reading using "whole language" methods or some derivative of "whole language" methods; and

WHEREAS, in reading, only 42.6% of Tennessee schools surpassed the national average, based on 1995 testing; and

WHEREAS, an estimated 500,000 Tennesseans do not have the basic skills needed to complete minimum tasks in today's service-oriented and technologically-advanced workplace; now, therefore,

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "Right to Read Act of 1996".

SECTION 2. Not later than the 1997-98 school year, all boards of education in Tennessee shall direct that systematic, intensive, and direct teaching of phonics information and its application to written word analysis shall be implemented in all public elementary schools under their jurisdiction. Parents shall reserve the right to select other methods of reading instruction for their children after being informed of the availability of systematic, intensive, and direct phonics instruction.

SECTION 3. A nationally recognized norm-referenced, standardized reading achievement test selected by the state board of education, shall be administered at the end of each school year to all students in grades one (1) through three (3) of Tennessee public schools. The state board of education shall establish a minimal score for reading skills mastery on this test, to be no less than its twenty-fifth (25th) percentiles. Local school boards may establish a higher level of reading mastery than that required by the state board of education as the state minimum.

SECTION 4. Students in grades one (1) through three (3) who fail to achieve the minimum score in reading for their specific grade level shall be retained in that grade unless they receive specified remedial reading instruction.

SECTION 5. Upon implementation of this act, all colleges and universities in Tennessee that prepare candidates for state teacher certification shall be required immediately to offer a course in the systematic, intensive and direct teaching of phonics information and how it is applied to written word analysis, and word recognition. This course shall require extensive training in systematic, intensive, and direct phonics instruction for students seeking certification to teach in grades kindergarten (K) through three (3) in Tennessee public schools.

SECTION 6. Local boards of education shall provide in-service training for elementary school teachers who previously have not received such training in systematic, intensive, and direct instruction of phonics information, and word analysis.

SECTION 7.

(a) The state board of education shall set forth specific penalties for noncompliance with this act by colleges, universities, and local education agencies.

(b)(1) A school district in noncompliance shall lose a designated proportion of its state financial support.

(2) School superintendents who violate the provisions of this act shall suffer suspensions of the school administration credentials.

(3) Colleges and universities in violation of this act shall have their certification to educate teachers suspended until they come into compliance.

SECTION 8. For the purpose of promulgating necessary rules and regulations and developing necessary courses or training programs, this act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it. For all other purposes, it shall take effect at the times specified therein, the public welfare requiring it, but no later than the 1997-1998 school year.

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